

that may spend more than 15 or 20 years in retirement drawing benefits from a system that was never designed to support them for that length of time.

Unless we plan to continue the payroll tax hikes of the past, which is not a prospect I would support, we need to update and modernize the system to save Social Security for the 21st century.

As I mentioned, Social Security is a pay-as-you-go system, with current workers paying taxes to support current benefits for retirees. This means there must be enough workers paying taxes to provide for retirees. The ratio of workers to retirees has been steadily declining, and this is possibly the most telling comparison showing the need for reform.

As this next chart shows, in 1945, there were 42 workers paying taxes for every single person receiving benefits. In 2005, 3.3 workers pay for each beneficiary, and soon there will be two workers paying for every single person receiving benefits.

As the baby boomers retire, the workforce cannot support the aging population. Since we have such a large number of retired citizens, the Social Security system will be depleted in the not so distant future. We need to update and modernize the system to save Social Security for the 21st century.

Realities have changed in many different ways since Social Security was created in 1935. People live longer. Seniors make up a larger percentage of the population. Women make up more of the workforce, and the worker-to-beneficiary ratio is falling. Unless Congress faces up to these realities, the long-term outlook for Social Security is very bleak.

In conclusion, let me point to my last chart, which shows that in 2018, Social Security costs will permanently exceed revenues, as the lines cross at this point. My colleagues on the other side of the aisle would like us to believe that doing nothing is the best course of action. I happen to believe differently. I stress to my colleagues that the cost of doing nothing is a serious detriment to the Social Security system for future generations. Time is running out. This problem will not go away. This Congress, this year, we must update and modernize the system to save Social Security for the 21st century.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Carolina.

SOCIAL SECURITY'S CHALLENGE

Mr. DEMINT. Mr. President, I rise to discuss Social Security and to say how honored I am to serve along with the President, who has shown his willingness to confront very difficult issues to help build a better future for America.

President Bush has clearly laid out that we have a challenge with our Social Security system, but he has also

made it clear that he believes Social Security is a promise we must keep. Social Security was started to make sure that no American retiree, no senior citizen lived in poverty. It has been successful in accomplishing that. This is a promise we need to make sure is part of any changes in Social Security.

We know that change is frightening for all of us, particularly senior citizens. I know in my own family, as my relatives have gotten older, the less change the better for them. And we need to make sure of any changes in their financial security, that we reassure them that we are not taking anything away that will put them at risk. Unfortunately, as we discuss needed changes in Social Security, some have taken advantage of this to frighten our seniors. What I would like to discuss briefly this morning is what retirees and workers in this country need to know about the changes that President Bush is discussing.

One thing is important to make clear: The changes in Social Security that we are discussing today and that the President is discussing as he travels around the country will not affect anyone over 55. Anyone born before 1950 does not have to give these changes a second thought. Nothing about their retirement income will be affected. It is secure. In fact, the legislation we are discussing will, for the first time, guarantee that we won't change their benefits. It is important for everyone to know, particularly those over 55, that as the program is structured today, this Senate, this Congress, this President could change it at any time. In fact, many people who say there is no problem with the system and that these things could be corrected with small adjustments, unfortunately, when you ask them what these adjustments are, they are always small benefit cuts and tax increases, as we have done over 30 times in the past.

The President is talking about making sure that this doesn't happen again for anyone over 55. But what folks below 55 need to know—my children and, hopefully, someday my grandchildren—is that we are actually going to give them a better deal than they have now with Social Security because by the time my children retire, the current program will begin to cut their benefits dramatically.

It is important for American workers today to know that the average American family contributes over \$5,000 a year in Social Security taxes. That is a lot of money for families who have very little money to save. Unfortunately, we are not saving one penny of what today's workers are putting into Social Security.

When I say that to folks back home, they generally smile at me like I am not telling them the truth: You mean we are putting over \$5,000 a year in Social Security and you are not saving one penny of that?

I say: That is exactly true, unfortunately.

This is a very risky situation for people who are working today and contributing a lot of money. And folks who are talking about making small adjustments to fix Social Security for their future are actually asking them to pay more into Social Security in return for a smaller benefit in the future.

Fortunately, our President does not think this is a good deal. The plan that the President is discussing—and actually some variations that a lot of us have been working on—needs to make sure that any changes in the Social Security system are actually a better deal for poor and middle-income workers. I know one plan we have worked on is actually constructed in a way that the less people make, the bigger percentage of their Social Security taxes goes into their account. This gives younger and lower income workers the chance to accumulate as much money as they need to have a more secure retirement, with a better retirement income.

These plans also give people real ownership. I have heard folks say that the President's ideas take money out of Social Security and put it in the stock market. That is not true. I don't know if folks are confused or just don't have the facts straight, but what we are talking about with the President's changes is for the first time actually saving the money that people are putting in Social Security. And we are talking about, as a government, putting more money into Social Security than is now coming in through payroll taxes. So actually we are adding dollars to the Social Security system, making it stronger and more secure in the future. Younger workers will have the chance, as they work and grow toward retirement, to accumulate a savings account. And the exciting thing for us in the Congress is recognizing that many Americans now have no savings. They own very little. They can't benefit from the growth in our economy. And while a part of America owns things and it grows and earns interest, so many Americans don't have that opportunity.

What the President has put before the American people is the opportunity for every American worker to become a saver and an investor and to do it in a way that secures their retirement much more than it is secure today and protects their income. I believe that any changes in Social Security using personal accounts should guarantee low and middle-income workers a level of income so that there is no risk to them as they look at changes in the future.

We know, as we have looked at the program, that the opportunity for low-income workers is actually to get a larger income in retirement than they have been promised today. But we need to make sure, answering the critics of these changes, that we assure workers that there will be no benefit cuts, particularly for low and middle-income workers. And that assurance can be built into a plan.

It is important that all of us in the Senate and the Congress and, of course, the President, continue to let the American people know that the Social Security system, as it is designed today, needs some changes if it is going to be there for tomorrow's workers. But we also need to reassure them that these changes actually create a more secure and a stronger Social Security system than we have today.

As we have already said, the seniors of today, those near retirement, will not be affected, but younger workers for the first time will have the opportunity to actually save what they are putting into Social Security. This is an opportunity for a generation, for us in Congress to save Social Security, strengthen it, and make every American worker a saver/investor. This is an opportunity of which I want to be a part.

Thank you, Mr. President. I yield the floor.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, before the Senator from South Carolina leaves the floor, I know this is his first major policy address. I think he has addressed the Senate before on another subject, but this is his first address.

I would just like to say to the junior Senator from South Carolina that I have already learned that there is no one in this body, whether they have been here a while or just gotten here, who knows any more about the Social Security subject than the Senator from South Carolina.

Mr. President, we need that expertise. This is an extraordinarily important debate. I thank him for his support and contribution.

Mr. DEMINT. I thank the Senator.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware.

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, I am happy to be in the Chamber. I recall 4 years ago when I gave my first speech in the Senate, and I realize my colleague from South Carolina has given a lot of speeches over in the House of Representatives at the other end of this building, but it was a good day for me 4 years ago, and I suspect it is a special day for everyone involved.

It is a great pleasure to know the Senator, and I look forward to working with him. I welcome the Senator to the Senate and congratulate him on his maiden speech.

Mr. DEMINT. I thank the Senator.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. DEMINT). The Senator from Louisiana is recognized.

WORKING FOR THE PEOPLE OF LOUISIANA AND THE UNITED STATES

Mr. VITTER. Mr. President, what a difference a day makes. At this time yesterday I was riding in a Mardi Gras parade with my wife Wendy and four young children throwing beads and toys to throngs of young revelers. Today I stand on the floor of the Senate to participate in one of its many

great traditions by delivering my maiden speech—a contrast to be sure but perhaps a fitting segue since both exercises are about a wonderfully unique place called Louisiana and particularly the great faces and high hopes of its children.

As I begin, I wish to express to my new Senate colleagues what an enormous privilege and honor it is to serve with them. From our most senior Member, the senior Senator from West Virginia, to our youngest, the junior Senator from New Hampshire—I missed that mark by 3 years, by the way—this body is filled with bright, talented, and passionate men and women who care deeply about our country. And, of course, this includes the senior Senator from Louisiana, Ms. LANDRIEU, who honors me with her presence in the Chamber today. I look forward to working with each and every one of you, always putting country above party, people above politics. That doesn't mean we will always agree, of course. In fact, it may mean my words and actions will be particularly spirited and passionate, but that is only because of the sincerity and urgency I bring to an important job in important times.

There is also one even greater honor than serving with you which I want to acknowledge, and that is being chosen to serve by the wonderful people of Louisiana.

The media and pundits put great emphasis on my being the first Republican Senator from Louisiana since Reconstruction—or in 121 years. Put another way, I am the first Louisiana Republican popularly elected to the Senate in history. I think the people of Louisiana were very focused on making history in my election but in a very different way that had nothing to do with narrow partisan politics. They responded to my call to make history by lowering prescription drug prices dramatically; by expanding choice and access to affordable health care through empowering patients and their doctors, not Government or insurance company bureaucrats; by doing the difficult but necessary work to create great jobs in Louisiana, such as fighting corruption and cronyism and demanding standards and accountability in education; by forging a Federal commitment to save a unique national treasure, the quickly disappearing Louisiana coast; by truly honoring our seniors with true Social Security that the politicians can't touch.

This is the history Louisiana citizens voted to make, and this is the history I am committed to help forge. This is why my first legislative action as a Senator was to introduce the Pharmaceutical Market Access Act of 2005, to put affordable prescription drugs within reach of all Americans.

Now, I have to say this was not an easy first action. Clearly, this bill is opposed by some very powerful interests in Washington such as the big drug companies. It is opposed by the admin-

istration and was not particularly welcomed by any leadership in Congress, Senate or House, Republican or Democrat. But I could not ignore the wishes of a vast majority of Louisiana citizens.

As I travelled throughout Louisiana over the past year, I heard countless seniors in particular tell similar stories about the outrageous costs of their prescription drugs and how it burdens their lives. The United States is the world's largest market for pharmaceuticals. Yet we pay the world's highest prices. American seniors alone will spend \$1.8 trillion on prescription drugs over the next decade. Meanwhile, citizens of virtually every other industrialized country pay significantly lower prices, lower by 30 percent or more. And this includes many countries which are not dominated by old-fashioned statist price control regimes.

My bill would make prescription drugs more affordable by expanding free trade and world commerce, by legalizing the importation of prescription drugs from 25 industrialized countries with pharmaceutical structures equivalent or superior to our own. For the first time, individual consumers would be allowed to legally import prescription drugs for their personal use.

Critics of drug importation cite safety as their primary concern. I share a belief that the safety of prescription drugs is paramount. My bill takes steps to address real safety concerns and strengthen existing laws by adding new requirements to promote the safety of prescription drugs here at home and those brought in from abroad. It includes new requirements that imported prescription drugs be packaged and shipped using state-of-the-art counterfeit-resistant technologies or be carefully tested for authenticity before entering commerce in our country.

Drug importation is not a conservative or liberal issue. It is not a Democrat or Republican issue. It is a universal issue and challenge to provide our Nation's consumers access to safe and affordable drugs. That is why I worked to assemble a coalition of Senators and Representatives from across the political spectrum in support of this legislation. This coalition makes the bill unique as the first bipartisan and bicameral drug importation proposal. It is the companion bill to that offered by Representative GUTKNECHT in the House. An earlier version of the Gutknecht bill, of course, passed the House last Congress with my strong support and vote and stands as the only bill ever to pass either body on this subject. I look forward to working with all of my new Senate colleagues to advance this crucial fight. And, of course, my door is always open to those who want to join our effort or who have other ideas on how to bring the high cost of prescription drugs down to an affordable level. This issue is too important for us not to act.

In addition to lowering the price of prescription drugs, I look forward to